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U.S. Sens. Johnson, colleagues: Demand answers from Sec. Blinken and Sec. Mayorkas on vetting of Afghan nationals in the U.S.

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WASHINGTON—Senators Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), Rick Scott (R-Fla.) and Josh Hawley (R-Mo.), members of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, sent a letter to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Department of State Secretary Antony Blinken demanding information on how the agencies are vetting the Afghans and other foreign nationals brought to the U.S. since Kabul fell in August. The letter comes after Secretary Blinken admitted in a Senate committee hearing that "most of [the evacuees] were not" vetted prior to leaving Karzai airport in Kabul.

The senators wrote, "We understand that more than 120,000 individuals were airlifted out of Afghanistan. Of that number, the U.S. reportedly evacuated around 80,000 people and of those, 5,500 were Americans and over 73,000 were Afghans or other foreign nationals. Some of those Afghan nationals are currently housed in military installations in the U.S. We write today to request information about how your agencies are vetting/screening these individuals."

They went on to say, "It is beyond unacceptable that several months after President Biden's disastrous and deadly withdrawal we still do not have a full account of all the Americans who are still trapped in Afghanistan or a full account of the Afghans who were evacuated to the U.S. I urge you to immediately address the lack of transparency regarding this evacuation and resettlement operation and be

straightforward with the American people."

The full text of the letter can be found here and below.

December 16, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas

Secretary

Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Antony Blinken

Secretary

Department of State

2201 C Street, N.W.

Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken:

Four months ago, the United States began mass evacuations of government personnel, citizens, and foreign nationals out of Afghanistan.[1] During a nonpublic briefing before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, it was made clear that not all security and vetting measures have been taken to ensure the safety of our homeland. We understand that more than 120,000 individuals were airlifted out of Afghanistan.[2] Of that number, the U.S. reportedly evacuated around 80,000 people and of those, 5,500 were Americans and over 73,000 were Afghans or other foreign nationals.[3] Some of those Afghan nationals are currently housed in military installations in the U.S. We write today to

request information about how your agencies are vetting/screening these individuals.

During the briefing, Senator Johnson described the chaos that played out at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul in August 2021 and that many of the individuals that U.S. forces evacuated had no form of identification. In testimony at a Senate committee hearing, Secretary Blinken confirmed, “most of them were not” vetted before leaving the Karzai airport and despite Blinken’s assurances that these individuals were vetted before arriving on U.S. soil, we are still concerned about your agencies’ ability to fully vet these individuals if they do not have any identification documents and cannot prove who they claim to be.[4] Further, it is not clear what steps your agencies are taking in cases where agency officials cannot immediately confirm the identity of certain individuals.

It is beyond unacceptable that several months after President Biden’s disastrous and deadly withdrawal we still do not have a full account of all the Americans who are still trapped in Afghanistan or a full account of the Afghans who were evacuated to the U.S. I urge you to immediately address the lack of transparency regarding this evacuation and resettlement operation and be straightforward with the American people.

In order to better understand how your agencies are vetting/screening these individuals before placing them in communities, we request you provide the following information:

1. Of the Afghan and other foreign nationals evacuated by the U.S., how many have:
2. Had new identity records or documents created for them by U.S. officials?
3. Received instruction regarding the use of new identity records or documents?
4. Arrived to the U.S. without any identification documents?
5. Arrived in the U.S. with only a birth certificate or other identification documents typically insufficient to travel here?

2. What occurs when U.S. officials cannot verify an evacuee’s identity?
3. Of the roughly 80,000 individuals reportedly evacuated by the U.S., how many

are:

4. U.S. citizens;
5. Legal Permanent Residents;
6. Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders;
7. SIV applicants;
8. Believed to have worked for the U.S. government in some capacity;
9. Afghan nationals;
10. Other foreign nationals.
11. Single adults; and
12. Family units or unaccompanied minors.

4. How many of those Afghan or other foreign nationals have:
5. Been connected to derogatory information?
6. Been interviewed in-person?
7. Been put into secondary screening by your agencies?
8. Been arrested by your agencies or any other U.S. law enforcement?
9. Been removed from the U.S.?
10. Been put into the process for removal?
11. Been detained by ICE for national security or other concerns?
12. Been sent back to a third country for further processing?

5. How many evacuees are still being processed in other countries? What countries? Please indicate how many individuals are being processed in each country.

6. As evacuees are being processed both domestically and in other countries, please explain what occurs if officials find and validate derogatory information connected to an evacuee.

7. Of the Afghan nationals and other foreign nationals, how many have been sent to and then subsequently released into U.S. communities from:
8. Fort McCoy;
9. Fort Bliss;
10. Fort Lee;
11. Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst;

12. Fort Pickett;
13. Marine Corps Base Quantico;
14. Holloman Air Force Base;
15. Camp Atterbury; and
16. Washington Dulles International Airport.

8. Provide the number of these Afghan nationals and other foreign nationals that have been resettled in each state so far.

9. What is the process for determining where evacuees will be resettled? Provide a list of resettlement locations and explain how each location was selected.

10. Detail all communications with governors, local government officials, and law enforcement regarding the resettlement of evacuees into their respective communities.

Please provide this information as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on December 30, 2021. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,